

# ARThropocene

## Meet the Artist Maysey Craddock

### **Maysey Craddock**

#### *Artist*

My works mine the in-between spaces in the diminishing wildernesses of southern wetlands. They chase captured moments in the life cycles of forests, marshes and estuaries, illuminating transition and transformation in a dissolving world.

I work from imagery based on my own photographs of these ephemeral landscapes, from which abstracted drawings are rendered and then transferred onto a substrate of sewn-together fragments of found paper bags. Layers of gouache are laid over the terrain of the paper, conveying atmosphere and a recollection of the story of these spaces. This process of making and unmaking multiplies in materiality and image, mirroring the natural and geological processes that inform my work.

As an artist working in this era of terrifying climactic disruption, I create to offer a kind of song about these spaces, an elegy for natural systems that are daily being consumed by development, extraction and encroachment. These are places of persistence, tenacity and beauty, providing rare and precious habitat in a landscape that is being rapidly consumed and altered for human use. My paintings offer a visual back and forth, echoing wild spaces as ever-shifting repositories for impermanence, disintegration and the inevitability of change.

#### **Could you please describe who you are, where you are from and what your relationship to Anthropocene is?**

I am a visual artist living and working in Memphis, Tennessee, where I was born. Between 1989 and 2008, I lived in New Orleans, Louisiana and Munich, Germany. I have also spent a part of every year of my life along the Alabama Gulf Coast, where I have seen the landscape change in many ways.

As an artist, place is the foundational lens through which I see the world. Intimacy with the landscape and longing for that landscape have always been a way of navigating creative expression. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, a profound shift in my work occurred: architectural ruin and ideas of destruction, entropy and reclamation were a way of understanding how human forces shape the landscape. For

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the past six years, I have refocused that idea of ruin as an active force by concentrated almost solely on the specific landscape of Perdido Bay, Alabama.

This is an estuarine region with beautiful marshes and creeks meandering from its edges, but none of it is far from human habitation, highway noise or agricultural and industrial production. Once, the bay floor was verdant sea grass, and as a child I spent all of my time exploring natural beaches where live oak and pine forest meets the sea. Now, the bay floor is sand and the beaches are bulkheads and piles of rocks gathered to hem in a coastline that for millennia has always unraveled, washed away and re-formed itself in natural entropic processes. Much of this shoreline is developed, but there are a few natural beaches left. It is these spaces upon which I focus my attention, hoping to capture moments in the life cycles of these forests, marshes and estuaries in hopes of conveying, through beauty, their necessity and fragility.

## **What were your earliest influences of art and creativity?**

I have been drawing for as long as I can remember. I was fortunate to have parents who nurtured this and engaged me in art classes and museum visits. Original art was on the walls of our home, and growing up with these images imprinted me deeply and helped to foster a sense of visual language. Also, I grew up in the 70's and early 80's in a neighborhood with a lot of other kids: creativity and play was abundant in a world without screens. We were left to our own devices, and we figured it out, creating imaginary worlds and exploring the alleyways and outside spaces in our neighborhood.

## **Where do you get your inspiration from? Do you go out and look for something to inspire you or does it come naturally?**

Like many artists, I trust in the creative process and believe that out of the work comes the work. Of course, venturing into a new and unknown landscape is incredibly inspirational, but the process of making in the studio is where much of it happens for me. New expressions of color, responding to the materials, re-ordering and rearranging imagery – these all serve to propel my work forward. I also strive to inform myself through looking at others' work, whether it be artists, journalists, writers, etc.

## **How did you get in contact with the topic and what made you decide to dedicate art works to Anthropocene?**

Though this has been a subject important to me for many years, I didn't "name" it for myself until I became interested in Edward Burtynsky's work, probably around 2010-11. Hoping to expand my understanding and awareness of the ecosystems of the Gulf Coast, I also began to seek out information in the work of scientists, ecologists and geologists studying the effects of the Anthropocene in my area. With every passing year, month

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and day, my concern over the effects of anthropogenic processes grows more acute. Though my work does not, in comparison to many others', always overtly respond to or address this crisis, I commit to finding ways to express this in my work. This expands my understanding as an individual, and challenges me to keep learning, questioning, seeking and sharing this through the work.

## **According to you, what does it mean to make Anthropocene art?**

As an artist, creating any work is an act that is full of fear, hope, doubt and recognition. Making Anthropocene art is my way of remaining awake, vigilant and aware of the crisis we are in.

## **What are your ideas about the challenges that humans and earth are facing today?**

I am deeply concerned about the state of the world. When I drive from Memphis down to the Gulf Coast on a highway, I arrive with my windscreen almost free of the residue of collisions with insects. I can't hear the crickets over the air conditioners in my neighborhood, and in the very rare event that I am in an airplane, I am devastated to look below and see the degree to which human consumption and development have fragmented the landscape and decimated wild habitats. As of writing this, we are also in the throes of an acute and violent crisis of racial protests over the death of George Floyd. Our systems are failing us, and inequities and racism within them are being exposed. I have been thinking a lot these last few days about environmental racism and how systems of industry most adversely affect communities of color, and communities without a voice. There are amazing people and organizations working to fight this, and I hope these positive movements across the spectrum align for change in both our human and natural worlds. Educating ourselves is vital.

## **Would you say that you are living consciously in your everyday life?**

I try. Sometimes I succeed, and sometimes I miss the opportunity. I am careful with consumption and try to be vigilant with re-purposing material things and reducing waste (especially in the kitchen). My husband and I eat a mostly plant-based diet (occasional sustainable fish), carpool, live densely and pay attention to power consumption. In the studio, I use a relatively less toxic paint – gouache – where a little goes a long way. We are starting to frame my work in repurposed wood, and of course the substrate for my paintings is found paper bags. But, there is much more that I can do on a daily basis. Remaining vigilant and educating myself about what is going on is, I believe, also a critical way of heightening consciousness. When possible, I donate to organizations whose work addresses this crisis.

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### **Did the COVID-19 situation effect your work as an artist? If so, how?**

I am fortunate in that I maintain a studio not far from my home, in a building that has very few tenants and a lot of privacy. I have been able to keep my normal studio routine going, and have not lost any specific opportunities or contracts because of the pandemic, though a solo exhibition that was to open in April was only viewable online. Naturally, it has affected my concentration but it has also created a lot of space and freedom in my days to study and explore new ways of making.

### **Are there any plans for the future? Specific events or exhibitions that you are working on?**

I have an experimental video work on view now at the University of Memphis Museum of Art in a group show called "In 7, 6, 5.....". All of the artists' work address issues of climate change and the Anthropocene. At the moment, I'm working towards a solo exhibition that will open in November in Memphis at David Lusk Gallery.